

● Article ●

Juku as Supplementary Language Education in Japan

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Abstract

This paper examines *juku* (private academies or cram schools), which play an important role as supplementary education in the Japanese education system. A special focus is given to English language schools where students look for additional support to improve their language skills in order to be admitted into the more competitive junior high, high schools and universities. In spite of not being compulsory, cram schools are part of most Japanese students' lives, especially after-school English language classes at the junior high and high school levels. Instead of only supporting school courses, *juku* have turned into more remedial institutions for students, parents and teachers. The findings of this study suggest a strong parents' reliance on *juku* for their children's academic success. The financial burden associated with *juku* is considered a long-term investment for achieving better careers. A case study of an English private language school will illustrate the main characteristics and the role of *juku* nowadays. The results of the participant observation and interviews show students' positive attitude towards *juku* in terms of favorable academic results and socialization opportunities. Private academies, especially in language education, are filling the gaps in areas where public education has not been so successful. The high number of students attending English language schools aiming to improve their language skills discloses some of the problems in the public system.

Key words: *Juku*, English language school, cram school, supplementary education.

Introduction

Although Japan has a high literacy rate and Japanese students have ranked in the top 10 countries according to their performance in reading, math

and science (OECD-PISA, 2009), the process for achieving their academic goals is not a smooth one. Children study hard and involve themselves in the competitive world from an early age, they try their best to enter to the most prestigious private elementary and junior high schools, teenagers study lengthy hours after school to enter their desired high schools, and finally, high school students compete for their desired universities. One of the subjects in which Japanese students look for extra academic support is English. I found two main reasons for doing so; first, their classes at regular public schools have not provided them with adequate results for admission into the more competitive and prestigious junior high and high schools; and second, English is one of the subjects required to pass the university entrance exams, and perhaps it will be considered as a requirement for graduation¹. Foreign language skills are not only an important element to pass from one school level to the following, but also in the long-term English is one of the forms of cultural capital which students can use to climb the social ladder, when they graduate from secondary and/or tertiary education. Cultural capital (Kanno, 2008; Bourdieu, 1991) involves the knowledge, skills and qualifications that students get and develop during schooling. Language is one of these resources and provides them with linguistic capital. If formal schools do not provide students with enough resources to compete in an international environment, in terms of linguistic capital, where do they acquire the additional academic knowledge?

Juku (private academies or cram schools) are the most common type of supplementary education in Japan. Although they were originally identified as places only for preparation for high school entrance examinations, now there is a diversity of these after-school institutions in terms of size, administration, number of students, and subjects taught. Nowadays, parents enroll their children in *juku* not only to prepare them for high schools and university examinations, but also to provide additional education and to help the children keep up with their subjects at formal schools. The supplementary education that combines both purposes is called *sôgô juku* (Blumenthal, 1992), and it is the main focus in this paper. Within this *sôgô juku*, I will focus on private English language schools as one type of cram school that supplements and fills gaps that may exist in the English language education in the Japanese system.

The analysis focuses on the following research questions: What is the role of an English *juku* in the Japanese system? Is it necessary to attend an English

juku in order to succeed in the Japanese system? Is the existence of English *juku* a sign of failure of the formal education system?

Parents consider many factors in deciding whether or not to enroll their children in a private after-school academy, including their lack of time to supervise and support their children's academic work and a loss of confidence in the reliability of the public education system. In spite of a series of revisions in the curriculum and the introduction of English into early education, English is still the subject in which Japanese students have not acquired a high proficiency.

Historical background

Although the *juken*² industry developed during the 1970s and 1980s, its beginning was found several hundred years ago. Blumenthal (1992) traces the origin of cram schools to the schools in the Edo period “founded by individual scholars or educators specifically for teaching martial arts, special skills or the doctrines of particular philosophical schools.” However, the starting point of *juku* as privately-run institutions was during the Meiji period, when they were “often specializing in a particular subject such as English, the abacus, or piano, as opposed to ordinary public or private schools” (Blumenthal 1992: 449).

The Japanese leaders who participated in the Meiji Restoration had studied in schools established during the Edo period, according to Rubinger (1982). There were two main types of schools: the officially sponsored institutions and independent ones. According to Rubinger (1982: 5), the first group included the *han* and *goko*³ schools, while the second included the *shijuku*⁴ and *terakoya*⁵. The latter group included a large number of institutions that provided education to local people mainly in rural areas, with little or no support from the government. During the Edo period about 10,000 *terakoya* were established all over Japan, in contrast to only 225 *han* and 118 *goko* schools.

The basis of the current *juku* was the *shijuku* (private academy) established during the Edo period. There were about 1,000 *shijuku* created in that period. The following were main characteristics of the *shijuku* (Rubinger, 1982: 8-9):

1. *Shijuku* were generally established in the house of one scholar, whose particular knowledge in fields such as politics, philosophy, education, etc., or

their teaching methods and personality attracted a number of students.

2. The curriculum was free from control by the official education authorities. The scholar in charge of a *shijuku* was free to choose the subjects to be taught according to his own interests.
3. In relation to their constituencies, the *shijuku* did not discriminate between social classes or by location. It opened its doors to all students from different parts of the country and social origins.

According to Rubinger (1982), there were different types of *shijuku* basically divided by the theme of study, for example, ones that specialized in Chinese studies, Dutch studies, *Kokugaku* (Japanese studies), practical arts (calligraphy, calculation and military arts) and “Direct Action” (politics and economics). One example of *shijuku* was Teki Juku, one of the private academies specializing in Dutch. It was founded in Osaka by Ogata Kôan (1810-1863). Kôan got his background in medicine and language from his studies in Osaka, Edo and Nagasaki, centers of the most important academies at that time. He was known for his contributions to medicine, including the first texts in Japanese about pathology and internal medicine and the first translation of a book regarding the anatomy of the chest and tuberculosis. Teki Juku was a representative *shijuku* focusing on language studies, especially Dutch, which was restricted to official institutions⁶. Teki Juku encouraged the students not only to study Dutch, but also to continue their studies in other foreign languages such as English.

*These days we must explore English studies, but we don't have many capable English teachers or scholars of English so English study is not advanced. There is no time to lose [in pursuit of English language learning]*⁷ (Rubinger, 1982: 147).

Based on Kôan's recommendations, some students left Teki Juku for Edo and Yokohama to study English. Rubinger (1982, 147-148) mentions Ômura Masujiro who studied with the American missionary James C. Hepburn, who published the first Japanese-English dictionary in 1867, and Ôtori Keisuke, whose teacher was Nakahama Manjiro, a Japanese fisherman who went to America and returned to Japan in 1851. Nakahama was a translator for the Bakufu, the Edo government, and later was a professor of English at Kaisei

Gakkô in Tokyo. These and other students from Teki Juku became doctors, teachers, and translators, and achieved political and military recognition because of the academic training obtained at this academy.

When the country opened up in the Meiji period, English studies became popular, replacing the Dutch language. There was an increase in the number of language schools, as well as in English and American teachers coming to Japan and Japanese students going abroad. English kept its “role as a means for the pursuit of higher academic education” during the Taisho and the first decades of the Showa period, however “as the Japanese military gained greater power in politics, English began to be viewed as the language of Japan’s enemies, and English education underwent a period of neglect which lasted until the end of World War II” (Goto, 2007: 131).

The postwar time witnessed major changes in Japan. As a result, the Japanese educational system was restructured, including English studies. English has been part of the Japanese school curriculum and the entrance examinations at high schools and universities since its introduction in the 1958 Course of Study, although at first it was considered as an elective subject and “it was not until the 1999 Course of Study that English became compulsory” (Seki, 2004: 33). During the late 1990s and 2000s, major changes in the educational system occurred: the revision of the school curriculum, the reduction of the number of students per class, and the reduction of the contents and hours in a school week. The introduction of the “Period of Integrated Studies or Integrated Learning⁸” in elementary schools was part of the innovations implemented in 2002 (first proposed in the 1998 Course of Study). English activities at elementary schools have been included within this “period of integrated learning”, covering approximately one-third of the total hours designated to this course⁹. Although there was an increase of English studies per week in formal schools, especially in elementary schools, few teachers have been able to teach English with confidence. They still rely on the foreign ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) to teach pronunciation and conduct speaking drills.

In line with these changes in the formal education system, then, during the last decades, the traditional concept of *juku* has been gradually changing “to refer more and more to privately-run tutoring academies operating outside regular school hours. The instruction offered at such *juku* today varies greatly in subject matter, method, intensity, and level of ambition” (Rohlen 1998: 306).

Types of supplementary schooling

Parallel to the compulsory education for Japanese students between six and fifteen years old, there is a system of supplementary education where children and teenagers study after formal school hours; parents spend thousands of yen every month on such classes. The so-called *juken* industry (Blumenthal, 1992), or phenomenon as defined by Rohlen (1998), Roesgaard (1998) and other scholars can be divided into *juku*, *yobikô*, and private tutoring.

The first category, *juku* includes both the *keiko goto* or subjects which are not part of the school curriculum (i.e., calligraphy, abacus, piano and sports), and the *gakushû juku* referring to the subjects learned at school, such as mathematics, Japanese, and English (Blumenthal, 1992: 449; Rohlen, 1998: 306 and Benjamin, 1997: 202). The most common purpose among Japanese students for attending *juku* is to prepare for examinations, and these cram schools are also called *shingaku juku* (Blumenthal, 1992: 449; Rohlen, 1998: 306); however there are also students who look to improve their grades (*hoshû juku*) and to make progress at the same pace as the rest of their class. The *juku* that combine these purposes are called *sôgô juku* (Blumenthal, 1992: 449), and are the main focus of this study.

Yobikô, on the other hand, refers to cram schools where the main aim is to pass the university entrance examinations. There are two groups of students who attend *yobikô*, the ones who are still attending high school and the ones who have already completed their high school studies. The latter group is called *rônin*,¹⁰ students who have already finished high school, but did not get into a university and are still preparing for the entrance examinations. Another difference between the *juku* and *yobikô* is their legal status. Blumenthal (1992) points out that “there is no need to get a license either to open or teach in a *juku*” which are treated just like any other enterprise, while the “*yobikô* are under the supervision of municipal boards of education basically in terms of the physical conditions not on the curricula or teachers’ salaries.”¹¹

The third type of classes are private lessons taught by teachers who have retired from public schools or housewives who run smaller teaching operations, often at home (Roesgaard, 1998: 72-73). Most of the students live in the neighborhood, and the teachers help the students with their homework and in specific subjects in which their parents cannot assist them.

As for the teachers' experience, the majority of people with no formal training in education "offer primarily remedial teaching and help with homework, while the examination-related extra teaching would often be undertaken by people with a university education" (Roesgaard, 1998: 73). In the particular case of English, some teachers received part of their education abroad (not necessarily in English teaching, but they have the language skills) or are native speakers.

Roesgaard (2006: 34-56) provides a comprehensive explanation of the different types and variables for categorizing *juku* into four main categories: *Shingaku juku*, *Hoshu juku*, *Kyosai juku* and *Doriru juku*.

1. The first and best-known type of *juku* is the *shingaku juku* that prepares students for high school or university entrance examinations. In this sense, there is little relationship to the curriculum of the students' regular schools. Usually, these students are high academic performers who are ahead of the curriculum at their regular school, and they find the classes there "boring" as they have already studied the material at their *juku*. The *shingaku juku* are usually located in strategic places, such as buildings in the center of the city, or near stations, schools or even universities. In the main entrance or windows, many of them display the number of successful students who have entered prestigious institutions, as an advertisement for potential students.
2. The *hoshu juku* help the students to improve their academic performance, providing teaching that is supplementary to what they study at their formal schools (Blumenthal, 1992: 449; Roesgaard, 2006: 37-40). This type of *juku* is smaller than the *shingaku juku* and generally is run by only one person: "most such *juku* rest on some sort of pedagogical idea conceived by the founder, who will be teaching alone or along with one or a few employees" (Roesgaard, 2006: 39). Usually there are no public advertisements, but parents and students spread news of the success of the teaching techniques of the *hoshu* teachers and the results in the academic improvement.
3. The *kyosai juku* offer more individualized and supportive education for the students who are behind the average performers. Most of the students attending the *kyosai juku* are the ones who have problems keeping up with schools as a whole; they have both academic and personal problems that hinder their improvement (Roesgaard, 2006: 41-42).

4. *Kumon Kyôshitsu* is a well-known example of the *doriru* (drill) *juku*. It focuses on extensive practice using exercises usually produced by the same company. The *Kumon* workbooks are found in almost all of the bookstores in Japan. This *juku* offers extra support for improving the students' skills in subjects such as mathematics. It is not only a support for the formal education, but also serves as a source of practice for students in other *juku*.

Despite Roesgaard's (2006) typology, it is sometimes difficult to define the specific borders between one type of *juku* and another. Most of them now on the market offer courses that involve a series of techniques and methods to improve students' skills. The *hoshû juku* can include *doriru* in part of the classes to reinforce certain skills. In the *hoshû juku*, junior high school students in second and third grades may receive support for their high school examinations, while elementary students may focus more on drilling and preparation for the junior high school entrance exams.

English language schools

English language schools usually known as *eikaiwa* (英会話教室, 英会話学校) or "English conversation schools" can be classified as part of the *hoshû juku* in the sense that these private schools support the students in developing and improving their skills in English. In spite of the label "conversation schools," the increase in their number and in their enrollment of school students has turned these schools into part of the *juku* industry. Like the *shingaku juku*, most of these schools are situated at strategic points such as near the main train stations, schools, and even in shopping centers. However, some parents worry less about the location than the reputation of the school, and spend one or two hours to take their children to these private schools for the sake of their academic proficiency.

Based on the typologies of Blumenthal (1992), Roesgaard (1998, 2006) and Rohlen (1998), English language schools are part of the *hoshû juku* providing supplementary support to students in one of the subjects of the school curriculum. Usually, most of the English schools do not identify themselves as *juku*, as the name generally implies exam preparation, drilling and rote learning. One difference between English language schools and *juku* is the

emphasis on conversation and speaking skills. However, nowadays language schools offer a diversity of teaching methods that fulfill students' needs according to the requirements of their school grades and ages. For example, they provide 2nd and 3rd grade junior high schools students with extra support for their high school examinations. In this sense they can be considered as *sôgô juku* (*shingaku* and *hoshû juku*). Other differences involve that of the ownership, administration, number of lessons per week, number of students per class, and number of English native teachers.

In 2008, language schools recruited approximately 4.51 million people studying foreign languages in Japan, according to the statistics from Nikkei (Lloyd, "English-language"). The English market accounted for about 4 million of the total, from children to adults. One of the largest English school chains in Japan was Nova, which was in the news in 2007 due to its collapse. Although it was one of the leading *eikaiwa* schools in Japan, with more than 15,000 employees (including 7,000 foreign teachers), more than 400,000 students, and 900 branches all over Japan, all its schools closed at the end of October 2007, and its president was arrested on charges of embezzlement in June 2008. The school was known for its costly language programs, for which students were required to pay in advance. A series of lawsuits and problems had plagued the company since 2005, including default on contracts and complaints from teachers and staff regarding delayed salaries and the absence of benefits and bonuses.

In spite of the big enterprises involved in the language business "the industry is highly fragmented [...] there are lots of students who appear to be happy studying in smaller schools. Perhaps the human element of local teachers you know and trust is still very important" (Lloyd, "English-language"). In addition to the preference for smaller and private classes, "Japanese business owners and managers have not figured out yet how to extract the best business growth and financial results from their foreign teacher employee base" (Lloyd, "English-language"). Lloyd also observes that in Japan the language market uses IT to a very low degree. Probably students are more used to the traditional drills and exercises on paper rather than using computers in learning a foreign language. In addition, face-to-face instruction and the presence of a teacher (preferably a native speaker) are still among the priorities for choosing a language school.

Perhaps due to the difficulties faced by the large enterprises, the *eikaiwa* industry is dominated by small and medium-size language schools. Dean Morgan Co Ltd, a chain of English and French conversation schools in Tokyo and Osaka grew from 3% to 8% a month from 2004 to 2009 (“Teaching Japan”). The introduction of software, good communication between staff members, together with a well-managed business plan have produced successful results in just a few years. One-to-one and group lessons are digitally audio-recorded and uploaded onto their servers, so that “students can listen to their lessons at home on their PC or on iPods/MP3 players, and review all the things they can’t necessarily remember” (“Teaching Japan”). Fees range from 1,500 yen for group lessons and from 3,200 to 5,000 yen for private lessons. The three outlets, Dean Morgan (in Tokyo), SALA (in Osaka) and to Hummingbird (a pronunciation school, acquired from another foreign-owned school) enroll more than 2,000 students, from teenagers to adults.

The use of software and computers to improve language learning is an example of how education can make good use of technology. However, the use of this technology is not limited only to the study of languages, but has been used in other subjects such as the example of Megastudy. net, an “online tutoring service” created by Mr. Son in South Korea in 2000 (Sang-Hun, “Tech Company”). As a web cram school, this offers a cheap and flexible schedule. Students are able to watch the videos and tutorials at different places and times, and the school emphasizes contents that are useful for the students.

***Juku* as an industry and business**

Roesgaard (1998: 73) traces the growth of the *juken* industry since the 1960s and 1970s. Due to the economic growth during the 1970s “many people found themselves able to spend more on their children’s education” (Sato, “Juku Boom”). The highest percentage (35.6%) of 1,000 *juku* started between 1971 and 1975 (MEXT, 1976 cited in Rohlen, 1998: 309). According to the statistics of MEXT (1993: 46) and Hisatomi (1987: 41, cited in Roesgaard, 1998: 73), in 1985, “27% of the cram schools belonged to a franchise chain and the rest were independent and in 1993 the percentage of franchise establishments had dropped to 19.7%. The bulk of cram schools were still small enterprises.”

In the last two decades, the declining population has been affecting the growth of the cram schools. However, Kurihara and Kiyooka (“Cram Schools”) have observed, “the only cram school market still growing is the one serving students preparing for middle school entrance exams.” They estimated that in 2006 there were still about 40,000 cram schools in Japan that might be absorbed by big chains.

The new market focusing on private junior high schools instead of university entrance exams has modified the structure of the cram school industry. Kurihara and Kyooka (“Cram Schools”) mention the example of one of the largest companies in Tokyo, Nagase Brothers Inc, which bought Yotsuya Otsuka¹² one of the “pioneer(s) in the cram school industry for middle school entrance exams, with a high success rate among students passing exams for prestigious private schools.” Another case is that of *Gakken Co.* a publishing company, that bought Tokyo Gakuen, an important chain of cram schools that specialize in preparing children for primary schools exams. The expansion of *juku* to junior high, elementary and even to preschool students are not the only strategies being followed: they are also expanding in the main cities of the country.

As for the fees, Sato (“Juku Boom”) mentions a range of 35,000 to 50,000 yen per month for elementary school students, and 30,000 yen for junior high school students, attending three to four days a week for three or four hours a day. The average of expenditures per student in one year is estimated at between 800,000 and 1 million yen, at the cheap end of the market. In 2005, the whole industry was a 10 trillion yen business including a variety of cram schools in size, methods and teachers. According to Sato (“Juku Boom”) the market is dominated by 20 main *juku*, led by Kumon Educational Institute with 1.5 million students, followed by Eikoh with 60,000 students.

***Juku* as Teacher’s job**

Juku not only provide an optional education to students, but also an optional job for teachers (newly graduated, retired and current teachers) who choose to work outside the “formal” education sector. It usually takes prospective teachers one or two years of study to pass the difficult examination to get the status of a public officer, required for a permanent teaching position

at a public school. Some teachers are hired on a part-time basis while others start working at a *juku* as a preliminary job. This is one of the reasons why the public officer status is considered as a higher status than the teachers working in *juku*.

Shimahara (2002: 86) describes one of the thousands of cases in Japan of teachers who are just starting their careers: “Kenji graduated in 1988, but failed the teacher appointment examinations, so he taught at a *juku*, a private enrichment school, for a year, during which time he took the examination again.” This option provides a preliminary job and training, especially for teachers who are beginning their careers, before they start working in public schools. However, the differences between *juku* and public schools, for example in the number of students in the class and the personalized instruction in single subjects, may also produce some problems for teachers when they face a different reality in public institutions. The case of Kenji described by Shimahara (2002: 119) shows this: “When he taught at a *juku* [...] as a part-time teacher, he had to deal with only a small number of students attending to their academic work only, but at Komori he realized that teaching meant not only teaching academic subjects but also guiding some thirty students in how to conduct themselves in a group.” Gradually teachers overcome the problems by using “classroom management patterns” and advice from experienced teachers (Shimahara, 2002).

On the other hand, teaching at a *juku* is also an option for former teachers or those who voluntarily prefer to work outside the public education sector, without the control and supervision of MEXT, or where they can use their own methods and textbooks for the benefit of the students. Although most people think that teachers who work at *juku* are less capable because they are not “public officers”, their teaching abilities and knowledge are not necessarily inferior. They have the same training at colleges or universities, and some of them hold higher degrees in their fields. Working at a *juku* is just another choice for some teachers, and does not imply a “lower” quality of teaching.

The focus on only one or few subjects, without the responsibility of other activities like coaching clubs or preparation for special events as required when teaching in the public schools, allows the teachers to specialize on their own subjects, and in some cases to become “star teachers,” as in the *shingaku juku*.

“Teachers are usually presented with their photo and the name of their alma mater. The phenomenon of ‘star teachers’ is also often exploited in advertising and such teachers usually receive very high salaries” (Roesgaard, 2006: 36).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) Surveys

The results of a survey concerning *juku* attendance (MEXT, 1994) showed a gradual and general increase in Japanese students enrolling for supplementary education: from 12% (1976) to 23.6% (1993) for elementary school students, and from 38.8% (1976) to 59.5% (1993) for junior high school students. The main reasons for studying at the private cram schools were: “The child wants to attend” (46.0%), “No one at home can help with studies” (33.3%), “The child does not study independently” (32.4%) and “School study alone is not enough to ensure success in entrance examinations” (26.0%).

In spite of the increasing attendance, parents and guardians foresaw several problems caused by *juku*. The MEXT survey (1996) revealed that 57.7% of the parents thought that children’s character formation is adversely affected by the excessive competition; 51.5% considered that students’ leisure activities and interaction with their families are affected; 47.8% were worried about students’ health due to long hours of *juku*; 38.1% were concerned with their finances; and 34.3% considered that the *juku* undervalue school education.

As for the total number of students MEXT (2007) found that 2,070,000 (29%) elementary school students and 2,890,000 (80%) junior high school students were attending private cram schools. About 6,770,000 (94%) elementary school students, and 1,380,000 (38%) junior school students took private lessons. MEXT conducted another survey called “Children’s Learning Activities Outside of School”¹³ among 67,512 parents and 53,458 elementary and junior high school students in November 2007 (MEXT, 2008). In elementary schools there was a steady increase from 16.5% in 1985, to 23.6% in 1993, and 25.9% in 2007. In junior high schools, there was an increase from 1985 (44.5%) to 1993 (59.5%), but a decrease in 2007 (53.5%). As for the subjects, the survey (2008) indicated that Japanese and mathematics were the subjects that elementary schools students studied more, followed by English

with the highest percentage in 6th grade (47.7%).

The main subject studied at *juku* changed from elementary to junior high school. English occupied the highest rank for 1st (87.3%) and 2nd grade (88.2%) junior high school students. In the 3rd grade, students concentrated almost equally on mathematics (90.8%) and English (89.3%). The focus on other subjects such as Japanese, social studies and science also increased compared to the previous grades, due to the subjects covered in the high school entrance examinations.

The statistics have been showing a high percentage of students attending cram schools since the 1970s with a gradual increase in elementary school students. These private schools have been spreading as a result of academic needs, which have not been fulfilled by the public system.

In 2000, MEXT started a new program for English education in elementary schools, in collaboration with teachers from language schools. Under the pilot program, MEXT selected 20 municipalities throughout the country and paid local cram school teachers to teach English on Saturdays. This program was intended to be part of the preparation for the introduction of English activities at elementary schools. In 2002 the plan to improve English abilities (MEXT, 2002) included, as part of its strategy to increase the use of English among Japanese students, the need to “strengthen cooperation, [...] with private-sector English-language education facilities to promote unified English-language education in schools and regional communities.” Unfortunately, no further data has been found regarding this pilot program.

Nowadays MEXT cannot deny the existence of *juku* or that these private enterprises have become part of the educational system. The pilot program announced in 2000 as a partnership with language schools, would have been a good start in recognizing the areas (as in English, for example) where the public system needs the support and expertise of language teachers. The following two sections will illustrate the current situation of English instruction in Japan.

Entrance examinations

The intensive preparation for passing the examinations to be admitted to the top public and private high schools and universities has been called

“examination hell” (*juken jigoku*), due to the demanding, time consuming, and extensive preparation. In the last three decades, the concept has been expanding to cover not only junior and senior high school students, but also younger students. This phenomenon shows the concern of parents for their children to graduate from prestigious universities to assure a stable economic future. A mother who enrolled her 1-year old daughter in a cram school, and whose 3-year old daughter was already accepted by a prekindergarten, reportedly said “I want to do the best I can as a parent to give my daughter good opportunities.” These cram schools specializing in younger students “may charge more than \$9,000 a year for essentially two and a half hours of instruction each week” (WuDunn, “In Japan”). Cook (2013) mentions the variety of *juku* with regards to their size and price, from small to large and costly well-advertised institutions. Dickens (2008, cited in Cook, 2003) estimates the monthly expenditure of Japanese parents to range from 6,000 to 100,000 yen, depending on the number of classes their children study at *juku*.

In the addition to the typology of *juku* mentioned above, Rohlen (1998: 311) distinguishes between “average” *juku* (to support school work) and “express” *juku* (where students have to study very hard ahead of the school curriculum, sometimes one year above the level of their classmates at school). The express *juku* prepare students in a very competitive and demanding way, insisting that students should study as hard as they can if they want to enter the desired institutions. The express *juku* are sometimes more demanding than the formal schools, where students study from early morning before going to school to late evening after their school activities, in addition to weekends and summer and winter holidays.

The market is not only expanding in terms of ages and grades: the cram school industry is now also focusing on preparing students for international universities. Route H (the route to Harvard University) is a one of the so-called “super elite” cram schools (“Cram school”). The exclusive cram school accepts only 15 students who pay an annual tuition fee of between 1.5 and 3 million Japanese yen for 240 hours a year. All classes are conducted in English and emphasize improving students’ scores in TOEFL and SAT tests.

The Current Situation of the English Education in Public Schools

The English *juku* emphasize using the target language in their classes and developing students' reading, writing and listening skills, but also their speaking skills. This describes a different situation from public school instruction. The introduction of foreign language (English) activities as a compulsory course for fifth and sixth graders in 2011 revealed a serious problem among elementary school teachers. Few of them were confident in teaching English, as it was not previously a requirement, and they have not been trained to do so. The results of a survey conducted in 2009 (Esaki and Shintani, 2010) showed the need for training in the English language. The majority of the teachers found it very difficult to teach English. Their biggest challenge was speaking in the target language and they recognized the need for training to develop this skill. In junior high schools the situation is better in terms of training. According to my observations carried out in 2008 in three junior high schools in western Japan, teachers were quite confident in their language skills; however, most of the teachers at the three junior high schools in western Japan prefer to use Japanese as the language of instruction.

Nowadays, MEXT is evaluating the possibility of starting foreign language classes in third instead of fifth grade, and of increasing the number of hours per week in later grades. Together with this reform, the government is also planning to make TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Language) mandatory for entrance exams at all Japanese universities (Matsutani, "Plan"). This may cause the public schools to focus more on improving the communication skills of Japanese students, as the current preparation for the English tests for entrance exams concentrates more on reading and grammar. The new proposal can produce positive results in the students' skills if we see an adequate training of the teachers in charge. The requirement for the English teachers will be a score of 80 points on the TOEFL test and "only 30 percent of English teachers at junior high schools and 50 percent of those teaching at high schools have English skills equivalent to that level" (Matsutani, "Plan"). These reforms may produce effective results in the long-term. Japanese students may get used to speaking English during their English classes from the earlier grades and may focus on their communication skills instead of only grammar

and reading. At the same time, this may cause the English juku to create extra lessons for TOEFL preparation.

Case Study: SES¹⁴ School

The SES school represents an example of a *sôgô juku* (*hoshû and shingaku juku*). It is a *hoshû juku*, in terms of its size, the founder's idea of improving English education in Japan, and in that it provides supplementary support to what is studied at formal schools. At the same time, it is a *shingaku juku* in terms of its location and the high academic performers who make up most of the students enrolled in the school. SES was founded in 1976 by a former English teacher, who, after working for public schools, decided to found his own language school, focusing on communicative English. His main purpose was to improve English education, providing remedial education given the problems faced in the public system. Although it is located in the central area of a city in Western Japan, the school does not belong to a big chain of *juku*. This school was chosen for observation due to its emphasis on developing the students' communication skills, its focus on teachers' training, its student-centered instruction, and because it illustrates a different scenario from the public schools. The founder's philosophy shows the concern of many teachers regarding the need for change in the English public-school instruction. This case study included interviews and observation of the English classes.

In 2009, the school had about 500 students, including elementary, junior and senior high school students, as well as adults. The schedule of lessons extends from Monday to Sunday, from 5:00 pm until 9:00 pm on weekdays, and from 1:30 pm until 9:00 pm on weekends. Students are grouped according to their school grades and their English abilities. The main focus of the school is to teach students communicative and practical English based on a long-term program training: after four or five years studying at this school, students are supposed to be able to communicate with English native speakers. There is no special focus on high school or university entrance examinations, but students who have studied for several years at this language school are prepared to pass the English language examinations for both high schools and universities without problems.

Unlike other institutions, SES only accepts students from the 6th grade of

elementary school. Classes are made up on average of 25 to 30 students in the case of junior high school students that form the largest group. Students have lessons of two and a half, or three hours per week, according to their grades. Lessons are divided into two parts: grammar, vocabulary and idiomatic phrases; and the conversation class, which is based on a team-teaching instruction and is divided into smaller groups of 12 to 15 students. Additionally, students are encouraged to take the STEP¹⁵ (Society for Testing English Proficiency) test every year.

As for the reasons why the students enrolled in this English school, in general they did so according to their own desire to study English and with their parents support. At an early age, students are more influenced by their parents' choices, though they gradually realize the importance of learning English. Also there are successful cases of students from the school who were encouraged to work in jobs where they could use English in Japan, pursue graduate studies abroad, or work in the United States.

In 2009, the school had eight Japanese teachers and one native English teacher. All of the teachers have a background in English language education. Most of the teachers have participated in training in the United States or the United Kingdom. The Japanese teachers use Japanese only when it is necessary. The school also pays special attention to the teachers' qualifications and training. Every Monday, the teachers at school gather for the "Teachers' Class." This is a class where each teacher presents 10-20 minutes of his or her own class, while the other teachers act as students. This class serves as a place to discuss and improve teaching skills. As part of the teachers' training, the principal of the school created a guideline called "Skills building for English teachers" (Sato, 2003). The English teaching skills are composed of planning skills and delivery skills. The former refers to creating and preparing adequate teaching material, while the later is composed of instruction and management skills. Instruction skills refer to the ability of the teachers in a particular subject (English) to introduce grammatical rules, teach pronunciation, use flash cards, and correct mistakes, among others, while the management skills refer to the teachers' attitude in class, the effective use of voice or silence, of paying attention to the whole class, and of encouraging and involving all the students in the lesson. Although Japanese students are usually quiet, the school focuses on developing an ability to discuss, by "provoking the students if necessary

and developing opinions in the students” (Sato, 2003). Management skills also include an open mind for accepting unexpected answers and opinions, comparing these responses with others, and conducting the class in an interesting and motivating atmosphere.

Examples of English Lessons

A. 6th grade elementary school students

Classes for 6th graders last for two hours and a half, and are divided into four parts. All classes for 6th graders follow the same structure. According to my observations, the first part consisted of a warm-up period that included songs and a brief review of 30 minutes. The following part lasted for 40 minutes, and included an introduction to the lesson. After giving different examples, the teacher asked the students to use the speech pattern with their own examples. Then, the students read and repeated a dialogue and the teacher pointed out the correct intonation and pronunciation after listening to the CD. During the following 60 minutes, the class was divided into two groups with two different teachers. The students practiced the dialogues with the teacher and in pairs until they memorized them. In the last part of the class, both groups gathered again and performed the dialogues.

During the class that I observed, most of the students were very active and participated in the class voluntarily. The students had to study before each lesson. In this class, there were more boys than girls, and the boys were slightly more active than the girls. The students read, repeated and practiced the dialogues enthusiastically and were keen to say them out loud. Although the length of the lesson (two hours and a half) is unusual for a language school, the well-structured program and the teacher’s skills motivated the students from the beginning until the end of the lesson.

B. 2nd grade junior high school students

Classes for junior high school students last for three hours, and they are divided in two parts. The first lasts for two hours and includes grammar, reading and composition. The class I observed for 2nd grade junior high school students included 45 minutes of grammar and reading. The teacher explained the grammatical points using Japanese to clarify the explanations. Students

were asked to make up different examples based on the main pattern. In the next hour, the class was split in two groups. Each of them had a different teacher for 30 minutes, then the students switched from one group to another. I observed the same group of students with two different teachers. During the first 30 minutes, students practiced the dialogues from their textbooks, first in chorus and then in pairs. During the following 30 minutes, the class focused on speaking; first the teacher explained some expressions in a short text, and then the students practiced in pairs and performed their dialogues to the whole class. In the last 10 minutes, students practiced for the *Eiken* test.

Although the junior high school students were less cheerful than the elementary students, most of the students participated in the class and raised their hands when the teacher asked for volunteers or answers. Students were very active during the practice time. During this period very few students used Japanese, and all the answers were in English.

SES presents different characteristics from public schools, the principal wanted to solve the problems that he found in public education to improve the English skills in the Japanese students. In SES teachers are more confident in their English skills than the teachers at public schools. Teachers use mostly English in their classes, and Japanese only when they need to explain some grammatical points. Especial emphasis is given to speak English in class and increase the students' confidence in their communicative skills. In public schools, most of the English classes are conducted in Japanese, and the students usually practice English with the ALTs. SES also emphasizes on the continuous teachers' training, as it was described by the Monday "Teachers' class" conducted every Monday.

Juku or English School?

SES is sometimes called a *juku* instead of an English school. As it was mentioned before, some people identify a *juku* as a place to prepare for high school or university entrance examinations including several school subjects; however, it also involves a supplementary education where students can improve their grades and keep up with the school lessons. This English school is not only focused on preparing the students for entrance examinations, but foresees a further use of the language. The comprehensive training offered at this school

allows the students to improve their academic performance in their formal schools, to succeed in the entrance examinations, and to acquire the capacity to use English in their future careers and jobs.

One difference between language schools and *juku* is that of the ownership. Usually, language schools are owned by foreigners or have more native English teachers, while *juku* are owned by Japanese, former or retired teachers. One of the reasons is that Japanese teachers at *juku* help the students not only in English, but also in other subjects at school such as Japanese language, mathematics, and other subjects that require skills in the Japanese language. *Juku* and language schools are private educational enterprises without supervision or support from MEXT, and in some cases they are profit-making. Nevertheless, not all the language schools try to maximize profits: SES offers a comprehensive language course for an affordable monthly fee.

Compared to teaching in public schools, teaching in language schools or *juku* has a different and sometimes negative connotation. Despite the fact that many teachers who work at *juku* hold teaching licenses after studying at university for four years and fulfilling the necessary requirements, the general public perceive them as less capable than the ones who work at public schools. The principal of the school mentioned from his personal experience that his parents and relatives were against the idea of him working in a *juku* instead of a public school, and others blamed his parents for allowing their son to work there.

The negative connotation is probably due to the profit-making orientation of some private educational institutions over the last few decades. However, the principal of the school also mentioned the positive connotations of the word in the past: “*Juku* were considered privileged institutions during the Edo period as the school for the samurai, while ordinary people used to study at *terakoya*. During the Edo period each *han* (feudal domain) had its own *juku*. One of the most famous *juku* was *Shōka Sonjuku* located in Yamaguchi prefecture founded by Yoshida Shoin. Many leaders in the Meiji restoration were educated in this institution”.

The Role of *juku* in the Japanese Society

According to Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu,

1987: 3 cited in Kanno, 2008: 25) capital refers to the resources that provide strength, power and profit to their owner. Capital is classified into four groups: cultural (including knowledge, skills, and educational qualifications), symbolic (status and legitimacy), social (networks and connections), and economic (money and property) (Kanno, 2008, 25).

In Japan, the educational system based on equality and homogeneity (according to the Fundamental Law of Education, 1947) should provide the same opportunities to all students. However, the reality shows that students are not given the same cultural capital. Parents' economic resources, location, schools, teachers, and the system itself influence the academic performance, narrowing the students' future possibilities. Ishida (1993) points out the effect of parents' education on the educational success of their children and adds the strong influence of the mothers' role especially for young students in Japanese society (Ishida, 1993: 74). In addition to the importance of the cultural capital, Ishida mentions that the origin and size of the family (social capital) to be an influence on educational achievements, as well as the economic capital owned by the parents. He argues "the amount of economic wealth and property which a family possesses determines the educational success of its children" (Ishida, 1993: 78). The effects of parental education, and social and economic background are important for students' success; however "there is no perfect reproduction of educational elites between the generations" (Ishida, 1993: 79).

According to Bourdieu, extra investment from parents is necessary to break the vicious cycle which he describes: "the combined effect of low cultural capital and the associated low propensity to increase it through educational investment condemns the least favored classes to the negative sanction of the scholastic market, i.e. exclusion or early self-exclusion induced by lack of success" (Bourdieu, 1991: 62).

Kanno takes Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital further, by including "linguistic capital." This refers not only to variety within the same language, but focuses on the "competence in a particular language, [...] the ability to use a language with high market value," just as employing the prestigious variety of a language "confers legitimacy and power to the user" (Kanno, 2008: 26). On the other hand, Kanno is not as deterministic as Bourdieu in terms of the influence of schools in reproducing social differences. She considers that schools and teachers are "powerful agent(s) for breaking the reproductive cycle" of

social and cultural reproduction.” Now the question is, how can teachers in the public system, with multiple duties and heavy workloads during the school day, break the cycle, if the government does not recognize the need to improve the system, both in relation to teachers’ training and students’ performance? Does supplementary education contribute to the reproductive cycle – or is it a means of breaking it?

Conclusions

The English *jukus* are a means of transferring, maintaining and creating the cultural capital of English fluency in a globalized world. In education, cultural capital is an important element that provides the students with the resources to achieve their aims (good academic performance, graduation from school, entering university and getting a good job). However, disparities in the educational system do not offer the same opportunities for all children. Parents with more economic resources provide more opportunities to fulfill students’ aims. Kanno (2008: 25) describes the greater possibilities available to students who belong to more economically stable families: “middle-class and upper-class children who enter school with abundant cultural capital are advantageously positioned to understand and benefit from the school curriculum and therefore are likely to end their schooling with an even larger share of cultural capital (i.e., academic success and educational qualifications) than their working-class peers”.

The number of students attending *juku* is a sign of parents’ concern regarding public education. Nomi (“Inequality”) claims that “parents are losing confidence in the quality of public school education and many are turning to private schools and out-of-school classes to prepare their children for college.” One of the reasons for this concern is probably the effect of *yutori kyōiku*¹⁶ since it was implemented in 2002. The decrease in the contents and length of the school week has not produced the expected results, which included providing children with more time with their families, stimulating out-of-school learning, and reducing pressure on Japanese students. In fact, “the reduction in school curriculum has led to greater reliance on out-of-school classes (*juku* or cram schools)” (Nomi, “Inequality”).

The popularity of *juku* is not only the result of the *yutori kyōiku* policy.

Many parents send their children to *juku* because they cannot help them with their school homework, and they look for additional knowledge to provide support to their children's needs. Additionally, *juku* is not only a place to study, but also a place where students socialize, especially children whose both parents work so that they are left alone most of the time at home.

Attendance at *juku* also reflects the social background of students and their families. In some schools, it is a sign of economic differences; families who can afford to send children to certain cram schools seem to be more "responsible" than others. The academic capacity of the students is judged based on their *juku*, not on their own efforts. Students may seem "smart" just because they have already studied the material, or practiced techniques to solve the problems faster than others who do not attend. On the other hand, regarding teachers' management of their classes, Sato (2004: 152) suggests that it may be easier to teach students who attend *juku* because they know beforehand what the teacher is going to explain. "[The] teacher's task is easier because there are more 'experts' who can help others. But their task is also more difficult because they must prepare for vastly differing achievement levels." On the other hand, *juku* attendance is not a solution for public school teachers; sometimes it also diminishes their authority, as students prefer to ask their *juku* teachers questions instead of them.

It is not absolutely necessary to attend *juku* in order to succeed in the Japanese system. However, the students' academic performance is shaped not only by their abilities, but also by educational policies, not to mention teachers' and parents' commitment to the system. An English *juku* is one of the tools that can lead the students' language performance to success. Under current conditions, students may continue to attend private cram schools as long as their parents see no changes in the public system. Thus the extent of their reliance on *juku* will depend on their confidence in the public schools. Parents may continue to focus on language schools in particular in the next few years. This might be one of the types of private cram schools whose students will increase if no immediate and adequate actions are taken in the public sector. In particular, with regards to facing the challenges in elementary schools with the inclusion of English activities for 5th and 6th graders in 2011, or from even earlier grades as the current government intends, and to improve the quality of English education at junior and high schools, there must be clear, decisive

and effective actions taken, if the public sector does not want to relinquish all confidence in its English language education. The internationalization of Japanese education should provide the students, the necessary tools for their success starting from earlier ages. Parents might not wait for any long-term improvement in teachers' training and revision of educational policies. Instead, they may be looking for the best and most effective language school in which to enroll their children in the short-term.

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¹ The Liberal Democratic Party proposed that universities include TOEFL scores for entrance exams, and as a graduation requirement ("LDP urges TOEFL"; Matsutani, "Plan").

² Blumenthal (1992: 448) called it an "industry" referring to the size and profits of the business that some of the largest chains of educational institutes or language schools have achieved during the last few decades.

³ *Han* (feudal domain) schools referred to the schools for the children of the *daimyō* (feudal lords). They were created during the Edo period and lasted until 1871. *Han* and *goko* were the official institutions focused on Confucian, military and moral studies. *Goko* were the branch *han* schools for samurai in rural areas. (Rubinger, 1982: 3-14)

⁴ *Shijuku* "私塾" or private academy.

- ⁵ *Terakoya* was the school for the masses including farmers, craftsmen and merchants where they acquired basic knowledge on reading, writing and arithmetic. It literally means “children of the temple” but during the Tokugawa period it referred to schools organized at temples or other locations without any religious link. Originally it was a place that accepted students as lodgers (Roesgaard, 1998: 30).
- ⁶ During the early part of the Edo Period, the study of Dutch was restricted to the interpreters who gained government recognition as local officers. This ban was abolished in 1720.
- ⁷ Text included in a letter written by Ogata Kōan in 1858 cited in Rubinger, 1982: 147.
- ⁸ The “Period for Integrated Studies” refers to the course included in the elementary school curriculum to study interdisciplinary subjects such as international understanding, information technology, the environment, social welfare, and health. Schools may also include topics based on students’ interests, or topics based on the characteristics of the region or the school (MEXT, 1998, Ishii, 2003, Ishikida, 2005).
- ⁹ Since 2011, third and fourth grades in elementary schools have 70 academic hours per year for each subject. Until 2010, fifth and sixth grades had 110 hours per year. The 2011 curriculum formally included English in the foreign language activities course only for fifth and sixth grades, including one hour per week.
- ¹⁰ Originally referring to a masterless Samurai, now it has the connotation of a student without university affiliation (Roesgaard, 1998: 72).
- ¹¹ This classification is different in some prefectures in Japan; for instance in Oita prefecture, both institutions (*juku* and *yobikō*) are considered as private enterprises. The municipal boards of education do not exercise any supervision over them (Oita Prefecture, personal communication, 2010).
- ¹² Yotsuya Otsuka was established in 1954 and has taught more than 200,000 students. The chain’s success was due to its ability to give lectures and produce teaching materials based on abundant past data (Kurihara and Kyooka).
- ¹³ This survey included cram schools (学習塾) (math, language, and other courses that support the students’ learning at formal schools), other private lessons (ならいごと) (abacus, sports, piano, calligraphy, and other subjects which are not learnt at formal schools), private tutoring (家庭教師), and distance courses (通信添削).
- ¹⁴ This is a pseudonym for an English school located in Western Japan, in order to protect the confidentiality of the teachers and students mentioned in this case study. I would like to thank the principal of the school for the information provided in the interview and the permission to observe the English classes.
- ¹⁵ Also known as EIKEN (英検).
- ¹⁶ Refers to the education policy that emphasizes out-of-school learning in the community and a more relaxed education program.